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Families believe 1 hostage beaten, 1 may not be alive

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WASHINGTON — The U.S. government believes that one of the seven American hostages held in Lebanon has been beaten and tortured by his kidnappers because he is a government employee, a congressman and several hostage family members said yesterday.

Families also said they feared that another of the seven, Peter Kilburn, may be dead. Islamic extremists have claimed responsibility for the six others but not for Kilburn. His niece said in an interview last week that State Department officials had told her they were not sure he was alive.

The hostage believed to have been tortured, William Buckley, 56, identified by the State Department as a political officer at the former U.S. Embassy in West Beirut, was kidnapped March 16, 1984. He has been held captive longer than any of the others.

Rep. Robert K. Dornan (R., Calif.) said in an interview that he and other members of Congress had been told at intelligence briefings that Buckley was believed to have been tortured soon after his abduction. He said State Department investigators had told him that photos of Buckley sent by his captors led them to believe that he had been beaten.

Dornan added that the investigators had other evidence indicating that Buckley had been tortured because his captors thought he was a CIA agent. He did not elaborate.

"They're convinced he's being treated as if he was with the CIA," Dornan said. "The other six are clearly 'innocents,' so to speak. But Buckley works for the government, so he was singled out for special treatment."

Families of the hostages, who met with Dornan and other members of Congress yesterday to publicize the captives' plight, had said in inter-

views last week that Buckley had been tortured and possibly moved from Lebanon to Iran. They said the reports were passed on to them from sources in Washington and the Middle East.

Dornan said the investigators believed that Buckley was still being held in Lebanon's Bekaa Valley, probably with or near the other Americans.

A State Department spokesman, James P. Callahan, declined to comment Monday on Buckley's treatment. He said it was department policy not to discuss details about Buckley because he was a State De-

partment employee.

Peggy Say, sister of one of the seven hostages, said in an interview yesterday that the State Department would neither confirm nor deny to the hostage families that Buckley had been tortured. But she said department officials did tell her that Buckley appeared in photos to be more haggard and in worse physical condition than the other hostages.

On July 5, 1984, Buckley and two other hostages were forced by their captors to make propaganda videotapes that were sent to U.S. officials. On May 16, 1985, photos of Buckley and other hostages were sent to a Beirut newspaper by the kidnappers.

Say's brother, Terry A. Anderson, chief Middle East correspondent for the Associated Press, was kidnapped March 16.

Because the embassy stepped up security for its employees and eventually evacuated them from West Beirut after Buckley's abduction, it is likely that the kidnappers began focusing on other Americans. Kidnapped after Buckley were a minister, a priest, two university employees and a hospital administrator.

Shiite militiamen — including those of Hezbollah, a group linked by U.S. intelligence to the kidnappings — have routinely told reporters that Buckley was a "known" CIA agent. Militiamen regularly accuse many Americans in Beirut, including reporters, of being CIA agents, but they made no such claims about the other six hostages.

Yesterday, the hostage families also said they feared that one of the seven might be dead. They said there had been no word from the kidnappers about Kilburn, 60, a librarian at the American University of Beirut who disappeared from his apartment in West Beirut on Dec. 3.

Kilburn is the only missing American in Lebanon for whom no group has claimed responsibility. In addition, he was the only one whose photo was not included among those sent by the kidnappers in May.

Kilburn's disappearance differed from those of the other six Americans in that he was apparently abducted from inside his home.

Kilburn's niece, Patty Little, said in an interview last week that Kilburn regularly took medication for diabetes, high blood pressure and the effects of a stroke. He is partially paralyzed on one side and walks with a cane, she said.

Little said the State Department had told her that "they are not sure Peter is alive."